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ABSTRACT

This paper, the first in a series of five on the current state of citizen education, focuses on citizen participation in decision making. After a brief introduction to citizen participation, the authors discuss the involvement of citizens in decision making viewed as a problem-solving process. The five problem-solving steps covered are: define the problem or need, gather information about the problem, analyze the information and develop alternative solutions, evaluate the alternatives, and select a final action or policy. Five guidelines for planning a citizen participation program are then discussed. The final part of this paper consists of seven tables that present the most commonly used methods for citizen participation programs and suggest the most appropriate methods to accomplish each of six program objectives. (EM)

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CITIZEN PARTICIPATION:

BUILDING A CONSTITUENCY FOR PUBLIC POLICY

By

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
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FOREWORD

As part of our mission to study the state of citizen education today, the U.S. Office of Education Citizen Education staff was asked to work collaboratively with representatives from different sectors of society. Our attempts to conduct this study in a participatory spirit confirmed for us what is often reported in polls: many citizens, unhappy about the way in which Government operates, are reluctant to do business with Government officials. They are suspicious of professions of "openness" and often believe that citizen participation is a ruse for cooptation or propagandizing.

While the causes of such hostility should not be oversimplified, nor the disaffection between Government and citizens overstated, in part the problem stems from a misuse of citizen participation by public officials and citizens alike.

In this paper, Nea and Walter Toner argue for a more sophisticated approach to citizen participation than has previously been the case. They suggest that citizen participation is an interactive process, involving an exchange of important information between public officials and citizens for use in planning and decisionmaking. Based on their experience in designing and implementing such programs, the Toners believe that incorporating citizen participation as an integral part of the decisionmaking process is a necessary step in resolving many of the issues which cloud this concept.

I hope that their approach will be useful to public officials and citizens who seek to make citizen participation a more productive enterprise than it has been in the past. Its implications seem particularly important for those in the public schools whose financial base rests on support from a skeptical public, and whose academic success is partially dependent upon increased collaboration with parents and other members of the community.

Prepared by the USOE Citizen Education staff, this paper is one in a series designed to help raise issues and provide information about the current state of citizen education. Others in the series include:

Key Concepts of Citizenship: Perspectives and Dilemmas

New Directions in Mass Communications Policy; Implications for Citizen Education and Participation

An Analysis of the Role of the U.S. Office of Education and Other Selected Federal Agencies in Citizen Education

Citizen Education Today: Developing Civic Competencies

Citizen Education and the Future

Citizen Education and the Workplace

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INTRODUCTION

"Citizenship Participation" is a loaded concept. It conjures up as many different images and emotions in people's minds as does the idea of "open marriage." It evokes cynical chuckles from the battle-scarred neighborhood planner, blank stares from a public administrator, a vengeful gleam in the eyes of an organized group of citizens, and downright shivers of fear from a local elected official. It is loathed and loved, mandated and disregarded, analyzed and eulogized, and not very well understood.

"Citizenship Participation" in decisionmaking was born as a national cause in the 1960's. Among the many things it has been called are public involvement, community involvement, community participation, citizen involvement and public interaction, all of which can mean essentially the same thing and are used interchangeably. It is defined in different ways, and means different things to different people. But whatever it means now, it is something many groups and individuals felt was missing in the development of public plans and programs during the 1960's; and Congress, planners, and citizens alike began to define it and make it part of the decisionmaking process.

The cause has had a visible effect. Citizen participation is currently being mandated as part of the decisionmaking process in most Federal agencies and programs and many State and local agencies. These mandates, for the most part, simply require that there should be "early and continuous opportunity" for citizen participation in developing public plans, programs, and policies related to health, education, welfare, housing, community development, transportation, energy, environmental quality, and natural resources. Many of these new rules and regulations also mandate specific activities or methods for involving the public, such as the frequently required citizen advisory committees and public hearings.

In the past 10 years, as these new rules requiring citizen participation have been inserted into major Federal and State legislation, planners and decisionmakers have concentrated on developing methods and techniques for sharing information and communicating with citizens. As a result, citizen advisory committees and task forces abound by the thousands, the formal public hearing is often substituted by or supplemented with informal public meetings and workshops, and agencies have begun to find more and better ways to provide information to the public, particularly through such disclosure documents as environmental impact statements.

This recent attention to opening up the decision-making process and finding better methods for information sharing between the public and decision-makers has been a critical and productive step in the development of public policy and programs that can be supported and implemented. It has helped to ease the bitterness and confusion of the confrontations in the 1960's by moving the planning process out of the professional and political backroom and into the sunshine.

While there is still some sturdy resistance from those who have basically ignored the whole idea as a passing fad and expected the commotion to die down and fade away any year now, for most there is at least an admission that citizen participation in decisionmaking is here to stay -- difficult, frustrating, confusing, but necessary. And for some, there is a growing recognition that perhaps this whole business of citizen participation is more than a new requirement in the governmental process for planning and decisionmaking, but is, in fact, a necessary element in the adaptation of democratic decisionmaking to a larger, more diverse, and better educated population than ever has existed in an extremely complex, technological society.

However, the creation of mandates and methods is not enough to assure that citizen participation in planning and decisionmaking is going to be a

worthwhile joint venture between citizens and their government. Even though citizen participation may well be a required ingredient in contemporary democratic society, too many public administrators, officials, and citizens still feel it is a waste of time; that it has sometimes surfaced conflicts and polarized issues beyond repair; that it can appear to be unnecessary game playing; and that it is a costly and time-consuming venture between citizens and their public agencies. There are still many unanswered questions about the best way to make citizen participation workable and productive and not an exercise in frustration for both citizens and their governmental leaders.

Certain issues and problems have persistently emerged in discussions about citizen participation among Federal, State, and local public administrators and their staffs who have had some experience in involving citizens in such diverse and difficult issues as public school finance or desegregation policy; development of local airports and freeways; policy for future energy supply; and plans to clean up the air and water. Although these issues are all different, the questions raised most frequently about citizen participation in decisionmaking have been the same. Some of these questions are:

1. How do we create trust and credibility in the planning and decisionmaking process?
2. How much citizen participation is enough? What constitutes success?
3. What is the role of the public during the planning process and in making final decisions? What does "early and continuous" participation mean?
4. Who should have a voice in the decision-making process? How should public input be weighted in decisions?
5. How do we avoid domination of the process by groups or individuals?
6. Is there a danger of creating more conflict than can be resolved?
7. Who should control the process of citizen participation? Should it be left up to the citizens or should the agency manage the program?

8. What methods and techniques are most successful for citizen participation?

These questions revolve around two problem areas for public administrators: lack of a clear definition of the goals and purpose of citizen participation in decisionmaking, and a concern about using the appropriate participation methods for achieving these goals and purposes. The first concern is about process, the second is about methods. Effective citizen participation depends not only on the use of appropriate methods but also on well-conceived relationships between the methods and the steps of the decisionmaking process. As long as citizen participation is related to the decisionmaking process in a fragmented way, it will be confusing, frustrating, time-consuming, and inefficient. The result will be that many planners and administrators may continue to question whether it is worthwhile at all.

Unlike Roberts Rules of Order, there are no commonly accepted rules or procedures for planning or evaluating citizen participation programs. Although agencies are now under mandates to initiate public participation, most are still somewhat at a loss about how far to go with it. Perhaps the missing ingredient is something that cannot be supplied through a mandate or through the use of any single method. It may be that people responsible for managing planning and decisionmaking processes need a better understanding of and ability to manage the process itself, and to integrate citizen participation into each step of the process in a meaningful way.

There is an urgent need to bring about a common understanding of what citizens, planners, and public officials can achieve through a participatory problem-solving process and how that process can be used to:

1. Accommodate all points of view in the process

2. Avoid or reduce the unnecessary conflicts due to fear and mistrust of the process or lack of adequate information

3. Surface and resolve where possible the unavoidable conflicts of interest that arise in a society of diverse values and goals

4. Achieve consensus or compromise

There has been too little emphasis on the public administrator's role as a leader and advocate of the problem-solving process. Too often public administrators are seen only as advocates of particular solutions. Their most important roles may be as problem solvers, facilitators, and mediators. Administrators and planners must trust the process as much as they trust their own opinions. To the extent that they see themselves as experts whose job is to prescribe solutions to problems they alone define, citizen participation will be simply a forum for selling ideas instead of a contribution to the process of solving problems.

The goal may no longer be that of convincing professionals to involve the people; the law says they must. The goal now is to provide administrators and planners with the problem-solving skills necessary to incorporate citizen participation into the decisionmaking process in a meaningful and productive way.

The challenge is particularly urgent for those who manage the educational system, especially the elementary and secondary schools. On a purely practical basis, the financial ability of the schools to deliver quality education rests in most school districts on the property tax. Proposition 13 in California has dealt a severe blow to the stability of school finance and the situation may grow worse next year when the State budget surplus may not be available to bail out the local districts. To the extent that the taxpaying public includes a growing number of non-parents, school administrators will have to reach out beyond the education family and power interests to establish a solid base of support.

On a more philosophical level, preparing children and young adults to function in a democratic society as a citizen, taxpayer, and voter is one of the most important tasks of education. As students leave the educational system and join the adult society, they take with them the notions about power, influence, and public decisionmaking that they have been exposed to in school. The school systems have a rare opportunity to influence the quality of public participation in decisionmaking through the expectations they create in their students. Decision-making processes can be characterized as adversary processes where might makes right and where the only way to influence the process is to have more power and show more force than others; or the decision-making process can be shown to be collaborative and interactive in nature where social interest and self-interest are balanced through a mutual problem-solving approach based on accommodation, compromise, and consensus. The future will be to a large extent what we make it.

To create an environment where students learn the problem-solving skills necessary to make a participatory democracy a success, the schools will have to approach the challenge from the inside out. It is not possible to have a problem-solving approach to social issues through civic education in the classroom and at the same time have a school board and administration that approaches desegregation, adoption of competency standards, and school finance or curriculum problems by dealing only with power groups in the community, and in a closed and guarded fashion. The students will see through the classroom charade and learn from the practice of the administration that when you leave the classroom, a different set of rules apply. They might be taught to be collaborative in the classroom, but in the real world, only power counts.

Citizen participation as a conscious part of the decisionmaking process in our public agencies has grown up in the 1970's and may reach maturity in the 1980's. In order to do so, it must be better

defined and understood by both citizens and decisionmakers alike.

This paper will explore some questions and offer ideas about:

1. Integrating citizen participation into the planning process
2. Adopting guidelines for planning citizen involvement programs
3. Selecting and evaluating objectives and methods for citizen participation

Since it is our belief that successful citizen participation in planning is the responsibility of those who manage the planning and decisionmaking process, this paper will address the problem from the viewpoint of the public agency. It should be of interest and value, though, to any group or individual who seeks to create and be involved in a process of public decisionmaking. When properly applied, citizen participation in planning offers the process by which we can all live and work together in a collaborative spirit, celebrating consensus and seeking compromise where necessary.

INVOLVING CITIZENS IN THE STEPS OF PROBLEM SOLVING

Successful citizen participation in developing plans and policies begins inside the public agency. It is metaphysically impossible for administrators and their staffs to tell anyone on the outside what they are doing if they do not agree on the inside. Without some level of agreement among an agency team and officials about the goals and purpose of citizen participation, the effort is subject to a variety of personal expectations and erratic levels of support which can easily erode public confidence. Many a progressive planner has initiated a strong participation program only to be faced with a boss who refuses to listen to information developed through the public interaction.

To be successful, the agency or administration should begin by setting clear goals and objectives related to the planning and decisionmaking process

which both staff and citizens can understand and support. It is particularly critical to surface conflicting expectations about citizen involvement and challenge such common misperceptions as:

-Citizen participation is a way to "sell" a program, project, or policy to the public

-Citizen participation will take the decision out of the hands of decisionmakers and put it in the hands of the "people"

Neither of these definitions, of course, is acceptable. But they do articulate some fears of both citizens and officials. Although there is no single definition of citizen participation in planning and decisionmaking, a commonly accepted definition is that: Citizen participation is an interactive communication process between the agency staff, officials, and the public which seeks to:

1. Provide adequate information to the public about the issue and alternatives for solution or action
2. Gather information from the public regarding their goals, values, interests, concerns, and opinions
3. Document and use information from the public in planning and decisionmaking

General as it is, this definition suggests measurable objectives and is a workable definition for developing a citizen participation program regardless of the issue. These objectives would require that the public agency give careful consideration to the questions:

1. How and when should information be provided to the public?
2. How and when should public input be sought during the planning process?
3. How will information gathered from the public be reported and used in planning and decisionmaking?

The first two objectives mentioned above (providing information to the public and gathering information from the public) can be accomplished through a variety of techniques and methods that are currently being used by many Federal, State, and local agencies. A summary of these methods is provided in Table 1.

Some methods are used purely to distribute information to citizens; others provide a forum where an agency can both provide information through a meeting presentation and receive public input through discussion. All the methods are valuable and all of them have been successfully used at the appropriate time and place during the planning process. Implementing many of the methods requires some level of experience and skill, such as random sample surveys or interactive public workshops using small group discussion exercises. At least several of these methods are usually integrated into most planning projects and studies that affect a significant number of people and create some level of public controversy.

Achieving the first two objectives of providing information to the public and gathering public input is the most visible part of a citizen participation program. But it can also be the opening of Pandora's Box if planners and decision-makers do not understand the real power of the process and ignore the third objective: the integration of information received from the public into the steps of the planning and decision-making process. It is not enough to hold a series of public meetings or set up a citizen advisory committee and assume this constitutes citizen participation. The ultimate test will come as the agency responds to what is said at each particular meeting or public forum. The agency must visibly demonstrate that it is using the results of the citizen participation program in the decisionmaking process. To do this, the managers of the process must understand how public participation can help achieve each step or phase in the process.

Webster's Dictionary defines the term "process" as a "series of actions or operations conducing to an end." In essence, planning and decisionmaking are problem-solving processes. The process requires that one must begin with the problem and work through a series of steps or operations in order to arrive at the best solution. The "best solution" is defined collectively by the participants in the process, not by the opinion of a single agency, technical expert, educator, scientist, or citizen.

To believe in the process is to believe three things: each step in the process is crucial in building consensus or compromise; it is impossible to adequately complete each step in the process without some degree of interaction with the people affected by the problem; and, in order to be successful, the process requires strong leadership and management by professionals with problem-solving and communication skills.

The basic steps in problem solving are generic to the planning and decisionmaking processes for any problem or need, whether it be related to education, community development, or the environment, or in a local, State, or national setting. The process is usually modified, reordered, or repeated depending on the particular conditions of the situation. The basic steps that will be discussed are:

1. Define the problem or need
2. Gather information
3. Analyze the information and develop alternative solutions
4. Evaluate alternatives
5. Select a final action or policy

These are familiar activities for anyone who has managed an environmental impact assessment, mediated a private or public dispute, served as a problem solver for a group or organization, or worked as a planner.

The power of the process lies in its ability to create an environment in which the participants

can fully prepare themselves to understand the realities, problems, and opportunities of their situation, understand each other's priorities and points of view, and enter into discussion, debate, and compromise until a course of action emerges which they are willing to support, given that any final solution to a problem will not satisfy everyone to the same degree.

The process must provide each participant, or set of participants, with access to the process and a voice in it. This does not mean, however, that everyone gets a "vote" in the final decision, but rather that those who make the decision -- local, State, and Federal officials -- must hold a certain respect for the process and respond to its result in their final actions and decisions, not solely to their own individual value system or to any single interest.

Perhaps the most important skill for the managers of the problem-solving process is the ability to recognize and resolve conflict. This requires a sensitivity to two very different causes of conflict. The most obvious cause is what might be called an "honest difference of opinion." It exists because people are different with differing beliefs, interests, goals, and needs. This type of conflict is healthy and unavoidable, a natural occurrence in a free society.

The other cause of conflict is harder to recognize and easily ignored by people with power and information. It is caused by fear and mistrust of the process, lack of power or influence in the process, and lack of access to reliable information. This kind of conflict is unhealthy, avoidable, and inhibits the ability of people to reach consensus or compromise. It promotes the need to look out for one's self-interest at <u>any</u> expense and creates an adversary approach to decisionmaking. It escalates into confrontation, protest, and litigation. It creates speakers but few listeners, debates but little discussion, polarization but not conciliation.

If people are well-informed and have an open and equitable process through which they can discuss and debate their differences, the assumption is that they will be able to work out solutions to their problems in a cooperative rather than adversary mode. If these conditions do not exist, it may be difficult to impossible to reach any compromise.

A well-managed citizen participation program should aim to avoid and resolve this negative form of conflict by keeping people well-informed, correcting misinformation, myth, and rumor, assuring that the agency is listening to all points of view, and seeking to create public understanding of and participation in the steps of the planning and decisionmaking process.

Following is a discussion of each step in decisionmaking when it is viewed as a problem-solving process and some considerations and objectives for citizen participation in each of these steps. This discussion will use the terms "public" and "citizens" to mean those groups and individuals who take an active part in the process by becoming informed about the issue and providing their thoughts and opinions at some time during the process.

Define the Problem or Need

It is logical, but not always a clearly practiced part of decisionmaking to define a problem or need before leaping to solutions. It is at this first stage of the problem-solving process that a great deal of potential conflict and polarization can be avoided by focusing everyone's attention -- planners and public alike -- on a discussion of the problem rather than on a debate of solutions. To understand the importance of this distinction, one must recognize the subtle differences between discussion and debate.

Discussion can be open, interactive, and informal, and can create an atmosphere of exploration, receptivity to new information and ideas, and lack of pressure to draw hard conclusions.

To participate in discussion, one must care about the problem but need not have arrived at a single solution.

Debate is rigid, less interactive, and formal, and occurs in an atmosphere of pressure to draw final conclusions and make decisions. In order to participate in debate, one must take a position and be prepared to defend that position and be more persuasive than the opposition. Once into debate, it is difficult, sometimes impossible, to change position and risk losing face or credibility. And as a good mediator knows, premature debate on an issue may destroy or weaken the potential for generating a compromise by forcing the parties to a dispute to take a position before they have explored all options or become fully aware of the problem.

Because a particular problem or need may seem quite obvious to agency staff members, the tendency may be to assume that discussion of the problem is unnecessary and will only slow down the decision-making process. Hence, there is a total misunderstanding of the value of this beginning point in problem solving in preparing people to find agreeable solutions. Participants in the process must fully understand and clarify a problem if they are to reach agreement on a solution.

This first step in problem solving is a genuine and early opportunity to invite citizens into an open, interactive, informal discussion about a problem or need, and to create a spirit of cooperative problem solving. It is a time for the agency to put itself in the position of the "listener" and learn from the different groups of citizens how they view the problem. This information will be critical later in the planning process as the agency explores possible solutions and their potential for consensus, particularly in a community where there are competing interests. Again, the private sector mediator understands this need much better than do many public planners.

People with conflicts of interest must have an opportunity to learn about each other and understand how people of different points of view are affected by a problem or perceive a need in order to bring about the concessions necessary for compromise and consensus.

This time for building trust and openness is successful only, of course, if an agency is truly trusting and open. The public is quite skilled at detecting an insincere effort to discuss a problem for which agency administrators have mentally adopted solutions. The agency staff usually gives itself away by unconsciously using the powers of persuasion, talking in debate style, and giving both verbal and non-verbal clues that they are not listening.

Creating discussion and avoiding debate can be achieved by asking problem-oriented questions and by listening to the answers without being judgmental or critical. This is not the time to ask people if they favor or oppose certain solutions or alternatives that may have already surfaced. Even if the focus on solutions cannot be totally avoided, it is critical to be certain that the following questions are being asked of different groups and individuals:

1. Are you aware of this problem or need?
2. Do you think this problem requires some kind of action or resolution? Why or why not?
3. What concerns or interests do you have related to this problem or its potential solutions?
4. What do you think is causing the problem, creating the need:
5. What information do you need to fully understand the situation?
6. What other groups or individuals do you know who should be contacted or involved in this planning, and decisionmaking process?

In other words, the public can participate in defining the problem along with the experts and the agency can aggressively seek to create this

public discussion early in the process before the pressures for final decisions become intense.

What this does for the process is invaluable. Public response to these questions can be used by planners and decisionmakers to:

1. Surface and acknowledge all points of view
2. Surface and identify related issues and concerns that must be addressed in the process
3. Develop a better understanding of the causes and conditions of the problem or need
4. Begin to understand areas of agreement and disagreement among different segments of the public regarding the problem or need
5. Determine what information the public needs to become better informed about the problem or need
6. Provide a base for developing a set of alternatives that have potential for consensus or compromise

This first step in the process is also a time to make a clear and open invitation for public participation and to notify the public about the purpose, steps, and timing of the planning and decisionmaking process and how citizens will be involved in the process. This can be done through letters, brochures, or newsletters to groups, organizations, and households or through public service announcements in the media.

Many methods can be used to achieve early discussion with citizens. The best methods are those that allow small, informal, and interactive communication to occur, such as neighborhood-based meetings, informal meetings with special interest groups and organizations, personal interviews and discussions with local officials and leaders of groups, organizations, business, industry, and labor, and random sample surveys either by telephone or in person. Large public meetings or hearings should be avoided since they may escalate discussion into debate. It is difficult to discuss a sensitive problem in a very large public forum. Smaller

forums of communication are more desirable early in the process. The important thing is to be sure that these questions are discussed with all segments of the public.

The importance of discussing problems before solutions can be found is illustrated in a recent school closure issue. The superintendent of a large, urban school system proposed the closure of several elementary schools due to a decline in student population. The people in the neighborhoods who were directly affected by the closure quickly organized a protest and the ensuing school board meeting became an arena of confrontation and debate. What emerged from the debate was a decision by the board to postpone the closures and the realization by both the citizens and the school system that there was disagreement as to the nature of the problem and fear that related issues and concerns had not been fully acknowledged or considered.

The school administration had seen the problem mainly as one of declining population and school finance. The people in the affected neighborhoods had little information about or understanding of the financial implications, but could immediately identify their own problem of a deteriorating neighborhood when faced with the proposed action. The rest of the citizens in the school district were left wondering whether this was the only solution to the problem.

As in so many controversial issues today, the decisionmakers backed out from the original proposals and initiated a study with citizen participation, but unfortunately only after a certain amount of hostility and polarization had already been generated.

Gather Information About the Problem

Getting "the facts on the table" is a common expression in bargaining and negotiation. It recognizes the need for people in a problem-solving process to have access to complete, clear, and

unbiased information. This is needed not only to become better informed, but to be assured that hidden agendas have been surfaced and that all social, economic, environmental, and technical considerations are, in fact, being considered.

This data collection step in the process usually begins at the same time that the problem is being defined, and will most likely continue until a final set of alternatives for decisionmaking has been developed. Early in the process, while the problem is being discussed and clarified, information about the existing conditions of the problem should be provided to the public. A full description of the situation will help people better understand the nature of the problem and the reasons that some action may be necessary.

Unfortunately, in the development of many projects and programs, this kind of information is not provided to citizens until later in the process when a complete set of alternative solutions has also emerged. One possible reason for this is that many agencies have not developed effective ways to distribute information to the public except through publication of a draft report or document which compares the alternative solutions.

What is needed for public consideration, early in the process before alternatives have been fully developed, is an unbiased "problem statement" or "needs statement." This document should provide the necessary demographic, economic, social, political, environmental, or technical information that describes the problem and can stimulate public discussion. It could be produced in the form of informal newsletters, brochures, or brief white papers which can be mailed or distributed to a target list of citizens who can help inform others. This list might include all local groups, organizations, neighborhood associations, businesses, local officials, and other identified community leaders.

In addition to receiving information early in the process, the public also has a part to play in producing data. Although the public often cannot or may not particularly care to be involved in the collection of technical data, there are data that only they can provide. This is information about how current values, goals, and interests of different groups and individuals relate to the problem and influence the solution.

The following questions may be appropriate for learning about the values and goals of various groups and individuals, neighborhoods, and communities:

1. What do you value most about living and working in your area?
2. What is most important to you about (issue topic)?
3. How might this issue affect the quality of life where you live or work?
4. What is your group or organization striving to achieve?
5. How might this issue affect the goals and interests of your group?
6. How might this issue personally affect you?

These questions can be asked along with the questions listed for discussion in the previous step, "Defining the Problem." One very effective method for assessing citizen response to a particular problem is to interview a cross section of community leaders, groups, and organizations as well as some residents living in the affected areas.

Involving the public in information gathering provides the agency with the opportunity to show the public how it will use citizen-generated information. If the agency has begun the discussion of the problem and asked the kinds of questions outlined above, then it should have a great deal of problem-related information about the concerns and opinions of different groups, or organizations, leaders, and residents. This critical information can be used in at least four ways:

1. It can be generally summarized and reported to the public to build public awareness of different points of view and the spectrum of issues and concerns related to the problem.

2. It can be used to assess the level of conflict that either exists or may emerge because certain groups or residents lack information or trust in the decisionmaking process.

3. It can be used to plan the kind of information and communication that will be needed to respond to the related issues and concerns and resolve conflict.

4. It can be used to develop alternatives.

The elementary school closure issue illustrates well the importance of early information exchange in the decisionmaking process. If staff members in the school district had taken some time to hold a series of interviews or discussions with members of the public both in the neighborhoods affected and in the district, they most likely would have foreseen the strength of reaction to their proposed solution. In addition, they would have been able to avoid the resultant polarization and hostility by immediately initiating a cooperative problem-solving process and providing the public with information about school finance and student population to begin clarification and discussion of the problem.

Analyze the Information and Develop Alternative Solutions

One of the built-in assumptions of problem solving is that solutions which emerge from discussion and are suggested by the parties affected by the problem are more likely to be accepted than if they are first proposed by the problem solver. That does not mean that a public agency may not have already considered certain alternatives, but there should be a time to invite all suggestions for ways to solve the problem before narrowing the list to those alternatives that will be further studied.

Again, the atmosphere of open, honest discussion can be maintained only by asking the

right questions and employing a bit of self-discipline on the part of the agency staff to remain as open-minded as they expect the public to be. The questions asked of the public during this step in the process might include:

1. What changes or improvements would you like to see in your neighborhood 5 years from now regarding this problem or need? Why?
2. What actions or steps do you think are most critical in solving this problem?
3. What solutions or alternatives can you suggest (if none is under study) or
4. What solutions can you suggest in addition to those already under consideration? Are there any modifications to current alternatives that should be considered?

This time to brainstorm all suggestions and ideas for action or change in an atmosphere that is still open and non-judgmental can be very refreshing and creative for citizens, agency staff, and officials. It provides a time when citizens can be assured that all possible ways to solve the problem have been surfaced and acknowledged.

This leads naturally into the next step in the process -- selecting the alternatives that will be further studied and evaluated. This is one of the most critical "decision points" in the planning process. If the final set of alternatives becomes too narrow, groups of citizens who support an alternative that is dropped may become too alienated to cooperate any further with the process. If the list is too broad, the public may get frustrated with a process that seems excessively expensive, time consuming, and academic.

The only guideline that can be offered is to urge the staff and decisionmakers not to drop any alternative from consideration that will alienate a constituency whose trust in the process is important for bringing about action on the problem. If there has been quality interaction with a broad range of

groups and individuals in discussing the problem, then the agency staff should have enough information about both the affected public and the problem itself to make appropriate decisions about alternatives.

At the time alternatives are narrowed, it is critical for the agency staff to acknowledge all the ideas they have received from the public and to describe clearly the criteria that have been used to choose which alternatives will be kept for further consideration, and which will be dropped at this point in the process.

This step in the process should also be used as a time to clarify and if necessary, redefine the problem or need that is being addressed, in light of new information. As the process moves into evaluation of alternatives, there should be a continual effort to keep the problem clear in everyone's mind and to acknowledge that this is a problem that certain groups or individuals feel requires resolution in one way or another.

In developing the alternatives, it is possible that decisionmakers will learn that there is not a sufficiently severe enough problem or need to continue the process. They may also come to the conclusion that the agency is not prepared to resolve the related issues or concerns which may be necessary to achieving a final solution. This is the time to assess whether the planning and decisionmaking process should continue or be abandoned. This assessment can save thousands of dollars and months of time if an agency can foresee that the process will lead ultimately to the abandonment of the project due to lack of adequate public support.

Returning to the school closure issue, when the school district finally did invite citizens and officials from throughout the city into the decisionmaking process, to everyone's surprise and

delight some very creative and innovative ideas emerged. One suggestion which was quickly implemented was the formation of a special agency/community task force to coordinate neighborhood planning in the city government with school planning in the school administration. Several other ideas emerged suggesting joint use of the schools -- partially for classrooms and partially as centers for other public services, for office space, and for private ventures. Simply closing the schools, as originally proposed, was also suggested by some citizens.

Not only did the school district surface all potential solutions through discussion of the problem by citizens, but new cooperation and improved communication were established between the city government, the school district, and the neighborhoods.

Evaluate the Alternatives

If the public is to be involved in a substantive way in the evaluation of alternatives, the agency has the responsibility to provide the public with complete, clear, accurate, and unbiased information about each of the alternatives under consideration. This includes information about the potential negative and positive effects of each alternative and possible ways to avoid or lessen the negative effects.

There may be a quiet time during the public interaction while the technical staff completes its data collection and analysis of each alternative and prepares this information for public review. In projects that create a significant amount of change to the environment, an environmental assessment may be required. The environmental assessment can be an excellent disclosure document for the public, and although a full assessment may not always be required, a similar kind of document on the alternatives can be extremely helpful as an information tool for the public.

Some groups and leaders may desire access to all the information available on the alternatives, but the majority of citizens should not be expected to wade through chapters of technical information in draft reports put out for public review at local libraries or other places. Many planning projects have helped citizens get simple and accurate information about alternatives through brief digests or summaries printed in the form of newsletters or brochures and mailed directly to local officials, groups, organizations, and residents or printed in the local newspapers.

Involving various groups of citizens in a thorough evaluation and discussion of alternatives requires careful preparation. Even though discussion at this step focuses on solutions as well as the problem, it is still important to avoid debate that locks people into positions and makes open, informal discussion difficult. Again, the specific questions that are asked of the public during this step are important and will help lead people into a useful analysis. These questions may include:

1. What do you see as the positive features of each alternative? Why?
2. What do you see as the negative features of each alternative? Why?
3. Which alternatives affect you or your neighborhood most directly? Why?
4. Which alternatives do you tend to favor? Why?
5. Which alternatives do you tend to oppose? Why?
6. Can you suggest any modifications to an alternative that would make it more acceptable?
7. Do you believe that any of the alternatives do not adequately solve the problem or meet the need? Why?

Feedback from these questions will provide decisionmakers with a base for assessing whether consensus might develop around any of the alternatives, or if public opinion seems so fragmented that it may be necessary to consider

an additional alternative, offer some modifications to a current alternative, or continue clarification and discussion of the problem before trying to reach final decisions.

A particularly useful outcome of this kind of discussion may be some new thinking about ways to avoid or lessen potential negative effects of an alternative. Agency staff should be sensitive to whether citizens are exposing an alternative because they do not believe it solves the problem or meets the need, or because they will be hurt or affected by its side effects or negative impacts. If the negative effects can be avoided or lessened it may create more support for the alternative.

The most productive forums for gaining substantive participation from citizens in evaluating alternatives are informal public workshops between the agency staff and groups of citizens. These workshops can be neighborhood-based or held for already organized groups. It is not so important to mix all points of view together in one meeting as it is to be sure that people representing all points of view have been involved in the evaluation process in one way or another.

An informal public workshop offers the opportunity for a certain kind of interaction in evaluating alternatives that is extremely difficult to create in a formal or semi-judicial public hearing. It provides:

1. An opportunity for citizens to become better informed through an informal presentation about the problem and proposed alternatives
2. An opportunity for citizens to discuss the information with planners informally, either in large groups or in small discussion groups
3. An opportunity for citizens to work in small groups and individually provide a written evaluation of each alternative

The results of this evaluation by the public should be thoroughly documented and reported to

decisionmakers along with technical information. This citizen input becomes critical decisionmaking information. It provides more than a simple report of who is "for" and who is "against" certain alternatives; it provides in-depth analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of each alternative as perceived by the public.

In the school closure issue, assuming that a final set of alternatives was developed for consideration, the school district might invite public evaluation of these alternatives through a variety of methods. The newly formed agency/community task force could conduct its own internal analysis. They, and school administration staff, could also help organize and be "listeners" at neighborhood workshops where residents could participate in evaluation. Other groups and organizations might also be asked to conduct evaluations.

Select a Final Action or Policy

As the time for decision nears, it is important that the agency staff review the outcome of the process to determine if they are ready to bring the planning process to a close. Aside from the technical data and reports that will be used as decisionmaking documents, there should be assurance that the decisionmakers also will have a full report of citizen participation, including:

1. Description of the citizen participation program and activities
2. Description of the various groups, individuals, neighborhoods, and communities that were involved
3. Report of each activity or method for gaining public input and a description of the results (meetings, surveys, briefings, committees, task forces, hearings)

Anyone who has conducted public meetings around a highly volatile issue has possibly been asked a very common and difficult question by participants at those meetings: "How can we be assured that

anyone is going to listen to what we are saying at this meeting?" This is a question that every planner and public administrator should be prepared to answer at any time during the planning process and for any method used during that process.

One of the most serious oversights in citizen participation programs is the lack of documenting and reporting public input to planning teams and decisionmakers in a way that is useful to the process. It is not useful to report only the verbatim transcript of a final public hearing. Although these transcripts are legally required and necessary, just as important are the results of citizens' discussions of the problem, their identification of related issues and concerns, their suggestions for alternatives, and their evaluation of alternatives. These discussions will most likely take place in the form of public meetings and workshops, meetings with groups and organizations, informal discussions with individuals, surveys and questionnaires, and citizen advisory groups and task forces.

It is in this final stage of decisionmaking that a public hearing may be desirable. Traditionally, a public hearing has provided a forum for debate prior to final action taken by a representative body such as Congress, the State legislature, a city or county council, or local school board. There is nothing inherently wrong with a public hearing, although many public hearings "go wrong" and can create as much confusion in the minds of decisionmakers as they can serve to clarify public desires.

One reason for this may be that public hearings were never intended, and cannot possibly be expected, to provide all the communication opportunities between citizens, planners, and decisionmakers that are necessary during the decisionmaking process. In too many cases, the public hearing has been the

only forum for communication and is a clear signal to citizens that there will be no discussion of the problem before debating solutions. The public hearing then becomes a time not only to debate, but also a time to let the agency hear, feel and see the amount of confusion, mistrust, frustration, hate, and fear that has built up among the citizens.

A successful citizen participation program should make a final public hearing a very predictable and positive event. There should have been enough prior communication and involvement that the hearing can serve its real purpose -- to give anyone a last opportunity to be heard before a decision is made.

GUIDELINES FOR PLANNING A CITIZEN PARTICIPATION PROGRAM

If citizen participation is to be a genuine part of the planning and decisionmaking process, then it must be regarded as seriously as the technical or scientific element of the process. This requires a conscious effort to prepare a work program with its own set of tasks, activities, schedules, budget, staffing, and evaluation procedures.

There are no specific guidelines for determining how much citizen participation should be sought on any particular issue. Obviously a complex issue involving a diverse set of public values, goals, and interests, has a significant potential for creating conflict. This situation requires a larger investment in participatory planning than does a fairly simple issue with little potential for conflict. The size, geographical spread and characteristics of the population, the complexity of the issue, and the resources available are all important considerations in designing citizen participation programs.

The first steps in planning an effective citizen participation program are to clarify the elements in the planning or decisionmaking process, determine when community involvement activities should occur, set objectives for the program, and develop a general profile of the issues and the public to be involved. Once the agency team has developed these basic building blocks, those managing the community involvement program can select the methods and activities that will be most productive in achieving the objectives. However, if there is confusion or disagreement among the team with regard to the fundamentals, the program may eventually fail.

The following guidelines may be helpful in designing a citizen participation program tailored to a specific problem situation:

1. Analyze the planning process for important steps and decisions
2. Develop a community profile and description of issues and concerns
3. Clarify information needs
4. Select appropriate communication and involvement methods
5. Determine a process for documenting and using public input

These guidelines provide a framework for preparing a work program which will assure that each method for providing information and generating citizen participation will be successfully implemented and that adequate staff and budget have been allocated for the program. A detailed list of tasks required to implement each method should be developed and a schedule for activities planned to fit within the time requirements of the entire planning and decisionmaking process. The role and responsibility of each member of the planning team should be made clear prior to initiating the program. Many agencies assign one staff member to monitor or manage the entire

program to assure consistency and coordination. Procedures for evaluating the program should be determined to monitor the effectiveness of each activity as it is initiated. Since it may be impossible to foresee all the needs for communication and interaction with the public that may be required during the process, a certain amount of flexibility in the program is necessary to respond to conflicts and problems as they arise.

GUIDELINE 1:
Analyze the planning process for important steps and decisions

1. Review the planning or design process
2. Determine critical points for public interaction
3. Agree on objectives for the citizen participation program

In order for citizen participation to be integrated into each step of the decisionmaking process, the agency team members responsible for the citizen participation program should become familiar with all elements of the plan or study, review with one another the timing of each phase of the planning process, and determine when certain information from the public shold be available for use in the process. This is also the appropriate time to develop a team agreement on the goals and objectives of the citizen participation program. A high level of commitment to the objectives of the program is necessary from both staff members and agency managers and administrators.

GUIDELINE 2:
Develop a community profile and description of issues and concerns

1. Develop an information profile of all affected/interested communities and groups
2. Identify major issues and concerns of each community and group

Before selecting the methods to use and allocating staff time and other resources to the effort, the agency team needs to develop an initial amount of information about the affected public and the level of concern and interest the public has in the issue under consideration. The first step is to develop a list of the groups and individuals with whom the agency may wish to communicate during the process. This should include lists of all affected neighborhoods and neighborhood associations, local government bodies and the elected and appointed officials of these jurisdictions, all boards, commissions, and committees that may have an interest in the issue, and all interested groups and organizations -- civic, special interest, business, industry and labor organizations. This also provides the beginning of a mailing list.

Demographic and social information should be gathered to understand characteristics of each segment of the public and to assess how best to communicate with and involve each.

It is useful at this time to conduct brief interviews with a selection of community leaders and residents to assess the amount of interest in the issue and identify the related issues and concerns that may need to be addressed during the process. This information should be shared with the agency team and used to plan each phase of the citizen participation program.

GUDELINE 3:
Clarify information needs

1. Identify information about the issue needed by affected/interested communities and groups
2. Identify information needed by the agency team from the public

From the information gathered through this preliminary field work, the agency team can outline

the type and amount of information that will be necessary to provide to the public during the process, and identify what kind of information the team would like to receive from the public in order to clarify the problem or need, develop alternatives, and make a final decision. A team discussion of information needs will help each technical expert on the team determine what data may be useful to provide to the public, and how the agency can present the technical information in a clear, concise, and relevant manner to the people who will receive it. Enough information should be provided to the public so that citizens can understand the issues, alternatives, and impacts, and make informed judgments. This team discussion will also clarify how the information received from the public will be used.

GUIDELINE 4:
Select appropriate communication and involvement methods

1. Select methods for providing information to the public
2. Select methods for public participation in each phase of the process

With the information developed in Guidelines 1-3, the agency team is now prepared to outline a citizen participation program and select the communication and involvement methods that are appropriate to each phase of the planning or decisionmaking process. A range of methods should be considered, including public meetings and workshops, surveys, small group meetings, personal interviews and discussions, directly mailed interviews or brochures, use of the mass media, and citizen advisory committees and task forces. Several of these methods can be used at the same time to ensure broad communication and involvement.

GUIDELINE 5:
Determine a process for documenting and using public input

1. Clarify the use of public input at each phase of planning and decisionmaking
2. Determine method and timing for reporting public input to planners and decisionmakers

The agency team should agree on the methods for documenting the information received from the public, reporting the information, and evaluating its significance. The values, goals, concerns, and opinions expressed by the citizens at each phase in the planning process should be carefully recorded and communicated by the agency team to the decisionmakers. This documented information should also be available to the public.

These guidelines and the work program developed from them will assure that the information generated by the community will be used in the problem-solving process along with technical and scientific information, to:

1. Define and clarify the problem from all points of view
2. Develop ideas for alternatives
3. Evaluate alternatives
4. Select a final plan or action

SELECTING AND EVALUATING OBJECTIVES AND METHODS FOR CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

The success of a citizen participation program should be measured against the objectives of the program and the individual methods used to achieve these objectives.

The tables included in this section suggest a set of six objectives for citizen participation that are appropriate to most planning and decisionmaking processes, and methods that can be used to achieve these objectives. The amount

of time, energy, and resources devoted to achieving each objective must be based on each different situation. The tables also suggest questions and criteria that can be used to evaluate the methods and objectives. Some of the criteria for evaluation can be based on quantifiable information while other criteria must be based on more subjective data such as professional and citizen judgment.

These tables are not meant to be all-inclusive. Standards and criteria for evaluating citizen participation are in their infancy. An overall measurement of success is whether planners and decisionmakers have enough information about public attitudes and priorities to provide reasonable assurance that final plans, programs, or policies are politically feasible, economically desirable, and socially acceptable.

The six objectives are:

1. Identify the public concerned or affected by the policies to be formed (Table 2)
2. Provide information to the public (Table 3)
3. Receive and document public comments, concerns, and opinions (Table 4)
4. Document, evaluate, and use public input where possible (Table 5)
5. Report results to the public (Table 6)
6. Provide program budget and staffing (Table 7)

This approach along with additional information about State programs for citizen participation can be found in the recently published "Techniques of Public Involvement," as part of "The State Planning Series," published by the Council of State Planning Agencies.

Table 1. - Commonly Used Methods for Citizen Participation Programs

Information Gathering	Information Distribution	Interaction
Existing Sources of: • Compiled Statistics • Descriptive & Demographic Information Monitoring Mass Media • Newspaper Articles • Radio & Television Field Work Survey & Questionnaires Existing Master Plans & Neighborhood Plans Existing Documents & Reports Reflecting Community Goals & Plans	Mailed Notices, Brochures, Newsletters, Fliers & Reports Newspapers • Legal Notices • Advertisements • News Releases • Feature Articles Radio & Television • Announcements • News Coverage • Talk Shows & Community Oriented Programs • Documentaries Displays, Maps, Models & Brochures in Public Information Centers Posters, Billboards & Signs	Small Group Meetings Public Workshops Hearings and Other Large Public Meetings Citizen Advisory Committees & Task Forces Personal Interviews & Discussions Briefings

Table 2.- Identify the Public

Objective: Identify the public to be involved in the planning and decision-making process including all neighborhoods, local jurisdictions, groups and organizations

METHODS	QUESTIONS FOR EVALUATION	SUGGESTED CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION
Map study area Analyze existing community data Demographic Political Social Economical List names and addresses of interested groups, organizations, leaders and officials Talk to local citizens, leaders and officials	Can the agency identify the specific geographic areas as well as special interest groups and organizations that comprise the public to be involved? Can the agency identify groups within the general public who were not notified or offered an opportunity to participate? How representative of the general public or range of viewpoints were the groups and individuals who participated in the process?	Documented list of groups, organizations, individuals and households notified in some manner during the involvement process Number and content of complaints made by public groups or individuals not notified or involved in the program. Profile of demographic, social and organizational characteristics of the general public compared with a profile of participants in the program (workshop attendees, survey respondents, committee members, etc.) Staff judgement

Table 3.- Provide Information

Objective: Provide the public with adequate and continuous information throughout the decisionmaking process about the problem and the effects of alternative solutions.

METHODS	QUESTIONS FOR EVALUATION	SUGGESTED CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION
MEDIA Television Newspapers Radio	How many people were reached through the media?	Media readership or viewership statistics
	Was the content of the media information relevant, concise and understandable?	Public poll to determine response to media or direct mail
DIRECT MAIL Newsletters Brochures Reports Notices Fliers	How many groups, individuals or households received the mailed material?	Mailing lists used
	Was the content of the mailed material relevant, concise and understandable?	Comments from citizens & groups on the mailing list
PRESENTATIONS Community Workshops Briefings Meetings Hearings Committees Task Forces	How many people attended the workshops, briefings and meetings?	Questionnaire and feedback from audience after presentations at meetings
	What was the response of people to the presentations?	Evaluation by citizen advisory committee
DISPLAYS Posters Information Center	How much confusion, lack of information or misconception of the issues seems to exist after dissemination of information?	Observation and professional judgement

Table 4.- Receive Public Input

Objective: Provide the public with appropriate forums for input into all phases of the planning and decisionmaking process, including opportunity to be involved in: (1) Defining the problem or need; (2) Providing information; (3) developing alternatives; (4) Evaluating alternatives.

METHODS	QUESTIONS FOR EVALUATION	SUGGESTED CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION
MEETINGS: Public Meetings Public Workshops Briefings Small Group Meetings Public Hearings PERSONAL INTERVIEWS AND DISCUSSIONS WITH: Local Officials Citizen Leaders Residents Groups SURVEYS & QUESTIONNAIRES CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEES, COMMISSIONS, TASK FORCES	Was the notification method for meetings adequate to encourage broad attendance by the target public? Did the meeting process produce clear and appropriate feedback from all participants? Was the timing and location of meetings appropriate to the needs of the target publics? Were survey respondent samples appropriate and statistically significant? Were questionnaires clear and unbiased? Did the surveys or interviews seek information from the public that was useful to the process? Was the membership of advisory committees and and task forces well balanced? Were the objectives clearly defined and useful? Was there opportunity for citizen input in each phase of the process? Did the staff and decision-makers have adequate information	Analysis of meeting participants through use of registration cards Where they live What groups they represent Documented results of meetings: - Group discussions, questionnaires, comment sheets, transcripts - Meeting evaluation by participants Staff analysis of survey sample selection, methodology and results Comparison of demographic data from survey, meetings and general public Analysis of how the results of each method were used in planning process General evaluation by citizen advisory committee

Table 5.- Document, Evaluate, and Use Input

Objective: Provide complete reporting of public input in a manner that is useful to the planning process and also assures that the information received is given due consideration by agency administrators and public officials

METHODS	QUESTIONS FOR EVALUATION	SUGGESTED CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION
Written reports of public meetings, workshops, surveys, questionnaires and other involvement methods	Does the report indicate the results of group discussions, individual questionnaires and oral comments?	Review of documentation format by agency staff, officials or citizen advisory committee
	Are the results tabulated and reported in a format that can be analyzed and used in the planning process?	Relevance of results to the planning process and decisions to be made
		Staff judgement
Audio-visual documentation Slides Videotape Film	Does the form of documentation help the planners and decision-makers understand the diversity of opinion and which publics represent certain attitudes and opinions?	
	Are all appropriate agency staff members and officials provided with copies?	
	Are copies available to citizen participants and the general public?	

Table 6.- Report Results

Objective: Provide a method for reporting the results of the community involvement process to the public.

METHODS	QUESTIONS FOR EVALUATION	SUGGESTED CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION
Report results in local media	Was there a process for reporting results after each phase and for each method used?	Feedback from citizen committees or task forces
Report update of results during public meetings and hearings	Were citizens aware of how these results were used in planning and decision-making?	Feedback from selected sample of citizens receiving the report
Report update of results at each meeting of advisory committees and task force.	How many groups or individuals felt that their input was not reported?	Feedback at meetings and hearings
Mail special report to program participants		Number and content of complaints from groups or individuals
Mail special report to selected lists of public officials, leaders, groups, organizations and individuals		Staff judgement

Table 7.- Program, Budget, and Staffing

Objective: Provide a budget and program management and staffing to ensure that the objectives of the program can be met.

METHODS	QUESTIONS FOR EVALUATION	SUGGESTED CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION
Prepare a plan for the public involvement program including:	Were the objectives appropriate to meet the needs of the planning process?	
Objectives	Were the methods for involving the public appropriate to the issue and communication needs and styles of the agency and publics?	Staff evaluation of results of citizen involvement program
Methods	Were all tasks necessary to implement the program anticipated and budgeted?	Feedback from advisory committees and program participants
Task Descriptions	Was adequate time scheduled to plan, implement and document the program?	Identification of tasks not anticipated or budgeted
Time Flow Diagram	Was the budget equal to the level of effort desired?	
Budget by Tasks	Was staff adequate to be able to implement all tasks, in terms of numbers and professional competency?	Identification of program elements eliminated due to lack of time, budget or staff resources
Staffing Requirements		

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